

1907

To Mrs. Potter Palmer¹

43 Welton Place, Chicago, Ill.,
January 12, 1907.

Mrs. Potter Palmer,
100 Lake Shore Drive,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Madam:

By the announcement of the daily press I learn that you are to entertain a number of persons who are to be present as representatives of two recognized classes of American citizens—the working class and the capitalist class, and that the purpose of this gathering is to choose a common ground on which the conflicting interests of these two classes may be harmonized and the present strife between the organized forces of these two classes may be brought to a peaceful and satisfactory end.

I credit you with perfect sincerity in this matter, but being fully aware that your environment and whole life has prevented you from seeing and understanding the true relationship of these two classes in this republic and the nature of the conflict which you think can be ended by such means as you are so prominently associated with, and with a desire that you may see and understand it in all its grim reality, I respectfully submit these few personal experiences for your kind consideration.

I am a workman's daughter, by occupation a dress-maker and school teacher, and during this last twenty-five years an active worker in the organized labor movement. During the past seventy years of my life I have been subject to the authority of the capitalist class and for the last thirty-five years I have been conscious of this fact. With the years' personal experience—the roughest kind best of all teachers—I have learned that there is an irrepressible conflict that will never end between the working-class and the capitalist-class, until these two classes disappear and the worker alone remains the producer and owner of the capital produced.

In this fight I wept at the grave of nineteen workers shot on the highways of Lattimer, Pennsylvania in 1897. In the same place I marched with 5,000 women eighteen miles in the night seeking bread for their children, and halted with the bayonets of the Coal and Iron police who had orders to shoot to kill.

1907

I was at Stanford Mountain, W. Va., in 1903 where seven of my brother workers were shot dead while asleep in their little shanties by the same forces.

I was in Colorado at the bull pens in which men, women and children were enclosed by the same forces, directed by that instrument of the capitalist class recently promoted by President Roosevelt, General Bell, who achieved some fame for his declaration that "in place of Habeas Corpus" he would give them "Post Mortems."

The same forces put me, an inoffensive old woman, in jail in West Virginia in 1902. They dragged me out of bed in Colorado in March, 1904, and marched me at the point of fixed bayonets to the border line of Kansas in the night-time. The same force took me from the streets of Price, Utah, in 1904, and put me in jail. They did this to me in my old age, though I have never violated the law of the land, never been tried by a court on any charge but once, and that was for speaking to my fellow workers, and then I was discharged by the federal court whose injunction I was charged with violating.

The capitalist class, whose representatives you will entertain, did this to me, and these other lawless acts have and are being committed every hour by this same class all over this land, and this they will continue to do till the working-class send their representatives into the legislative halls of this nation and by law take away the power of this capitalist class to rob and oppress the workers.

The workers are coming to understand this and the intelligent part of that class while respecting you, understand the uselessness of such conferences as will assemble in your mansion.

Permit me to quote from Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," where he says:

"Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

Quite appropriate to this fair land to-day.

Sincerely yours, for justice,
Mother Jones

Printed letter (*Miners Magazine*, 24 January 1907)

1. Bertha Honoré Palmer (1849–1918), Chicago socialite and mild reformer, first gained public recognition for her management of the Woman's Building at the Columbian Exposition of 1893.